

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 609
By Burchett

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Robert Webb of
Knoxville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Robert Webb, founder of the Webb School, Knoxville's largest and most prestigious independent private school; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webb was an extremely talented and compassionate administrator who motivated his students to reach their full potential, both as scholars and citizens; he established the school that bears his name, the third of three preparatory schools founded by his famous family; and

WHEREAS, from his grandfather and uncle, who established schools in Bell Buckle, Tennessee, and Claremont, California, he acquired a distinctive educational vision that emphasized academic excellence, a strong foundation in liberal arts, and the building of character and leadership; and

WHEREAS, born in Fort Sanders in 1919, Robert Webb was the son of prominent Juvenile Court Judge Clary Webb, but he more closely resembled the grandfather for whom he was named, William Robert "Sawney" Webb, who founded the Webb School of Bell Buckle; Robert Webb grew up in Knoxville but attended the Webb School of Bell Buckle, a boys' boarding school once legendary for its unusual institutions, including its ironclad honor code; and

WHEREAS, Robert Webb suffered polio as a child, which left him with a lifelong limp; after graduating from Bell Buckle, he earned bachelor's degrees in Math and Latin at the University of Tennessee, where, despite his disability, he joined the marching band and served as captain of the swim team; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webb was a courageous Tennessean who served with distinction in World War II as one of those noble Americans who earned the rightful designation of the “greatest generation”; and

WHEREAS, after the war, Robert Webb returned to Bell Buckle to teach after earning a master’s degree in School Administration from the University of Tennessee; a dispute with the administration led him to move to the Webb School of Claremont in the Los Angeles area, where he found a more suitable progressive philosophy; and

WHEREAS, he started his own Webb School in Knoxville in September of 1955, teaching classes to four unruly boys in the basement of the Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church, where his intention was to improve the quality of education in his hometown; the new school grew rapidly, and in 1957, Robert Webb added a girls’ school, before moving to the current campus, off of Mabry Hood Road, in 1959; and

WHEREAS, a leader in racial integration among southern private schools, the Webb School of Knoxville declared an open-door policy in early 1965; in 1969, Robert Webb delivered a controversial speech in favor of private school integration, challenging the Mid-South Association of Independent Schools to more actively promote racial integration and insisting that all schools needed to desegregate, not just those legally obligated to do so by the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling; and

WHEREAS, the Webb School of Knoxville was originally divided between boys and girls, but in 1968 it became the first of the Webb schools to be coeducational; after the boys’ and girls’ schools merged, the new coeducational Webb School adopted an upper and middle school structure; and

WHEREAS, throughout his tenure as the school’s head, Robert Webb was an influential figure in southern preparatory school circles; after his well-deserved retirement in 1984, the school continued to flourish; a new Webb Lower School opened in the fall of 1998, bringing Webb School of Knoxville into the twenty-first century with more than 1,000 students and almost one hundred full-time faculty members; and

WHEREAS, Robert Webb’s school has graduated many of Knoxville’s leaders, including Mayor Bill Haslam; Webb alumni have attended the nation’s most prestigious colleges and universities and have made significant contributions in many endeavors; alumni include Bill

Sansom, CEO of the H.T. Hackney Company; Hugh Faust II, a coal and timber heir who owns and operates hotels in Gatlinburg and is a member of the TVA Board of Directors; and Judges Bill Swann and David Creekmore; and

WHEREAS, during his career in education, which spanned more than thirty years, Robert Webb was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional, serving as President of the Mid-South Association of Independent Schools, the Southern Association of Independent Schools, and the Tennessee Association of Independent Schools; he was also a member of the national Headmasters Association and Director of the National Association of Independent Schools; and

WHEREAS, wholly committed to the highest ideals of public service and quality education for all, Robert Webb truly epitomized the model of the dedicated teacher and able administrator who brought out the best in people; he was a warm, kind, uncritical, and thoughtful man of discipline who loved the fortunate city of Knoxville; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webb worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; after his retirement in 1984 as a suburban schoolmaster, he became a major figure in the cultural evolution of his hometown, having developed an interest in Knoxville's bohemian subcultures; and

WHEREAS, in his last twenty years, Mr. Webb took a strong leadership role in several major downtown projects; he kept an office in the Bijou Theatre, a place close to his youth, and as its Director, was at the forefront of the major renovation of that landmark; as President of the East Tennessee Historical Society, he led the effort to establish the first Museum of East Tennessee History, and he co-chaired the campaign to expand the East Tennessee History Center, with its gracefully consistent architecture, to twice its size; and

WHEREAS, a visionary academic leader and public figure, Robert Webb earned the respect of his faculty, students, and community alike for the exemplary quality of his work and his dedication to duty; and

WHEREAS, Robert Webb was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Webb was most grateful for the love, support, and companionship of his devoted wife of fifty-six years, Julie, and he was a loving father to his two daughters, and he cherished his six grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Robert Webb leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Robert Webb, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character as an administrator, veteran educator, and public servant, and commend his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family, friends, and students of Robert Webb.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.